

# The MIDLAND

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No. I

## CONTENT OF THE WIND

By DON GORDON

The elements once more are content of the wind:  
Death is birth again for oxygen, for hydrogen and carbon;  
yea, for the total breath.  
Simplicity was before flesh and shall be after flesh;  
Body alone is shaken by pulse, only the brain is stress.

Let the friend die and the lover die.  
Law is a rack for the brain and the bone; but elements  
rest on the law as foam on the sea.  
Proton, electron, purr on endless orbit; the atom  
is serene. What had the involute heart?

Remembering space, the lawful star-work, the massive,  
fiery rings,  
Least particles, yoked to the intricate flesh, strain  
for the wider air, the deeper earths.  
Sinew turns; they turn with the convolutions. The voice  
is heard; it is not they who weep.  
Let these go that were not friend nor lover, not hand,  
not eye, not the mouth loosed forever.

Planets give no outcry in their grooves, nor the concourse  
of stars; the guttered and the burning globes spin  
in equal silence.  
Space is bloodless, dreamless; the universe has no laughter  
and no tears.  
Die; let the friend die and the lover die; chemistry is not kind  
nor unkind, atoms have no quick to bare.

# THE HEN

ALEXANDRA MAZUROVA

Mr. and Mrs. James Logan Brown, Martha, the sister-in-law, and their children returned home from Sunday service. Mrs. Brown hurried to the kitchen, pulled a cretonne apron hastily over her best dress, and busied herself with dinner. There was little to be done as she had started things before church. It was mostly up to the oven to do its part; the salad dressing was ready, and she had placed the custard pudding on ice before they left. She knew it was best not to touch it until everyone was through with the roast. In order to save the children's Sunday clothes, she told them to set the table; otherwise, they would surely run out into the yard and have dirt all over them.

Mrs. Brown instinctively glanced at the clock. "Oh, my, it is a quarter to one. Albert, it's a quarter to one — time to gather the eggs," she sired through the window.

She enjoyed going to church. It was nice to wear her best dress, to say prayers, and to sing with the organ, nice to meet friends. She could never let the children miss Sunday school, and was an ardent church member herself. Should anyone plan a bazaar or a social, she always volunteered to help with the refreshments. It was known to the whole community that her chicken salad was the best and the most artistic. For instance, last time she had made a cross in the middle, of green olives; nuts framed the edge of the design, while the outer edge was decorated with leaves of lettuce and chicory, one of lettuce, then one of chicory, so different in shades of green. Everyone spoke of it as a masterpiece. Even now, remembering the event, Mrs. Brown's face became all rosy from the delightful feeling of being prized so highly, and she moved about her work with dignity.

Her only objection to this Sunday going to church was the late hour their minister, Dr. Hughston, kept them (oh, she had such reverence for him and his wife). He certainly was a grand speaker, and said much truth in every word of his, so much faith and enthusiasm. If only he would make it fifteen minutes shorter. He must realize that people had to have their dinners early on Sunday. If not a chicken, a roast anyhow. Why on earth didn't Mrs. Hughston explain to

him; she should know better. Of course she *personally*, did not care, for *she* had an electric range that did the roasting and turned off automatically. Well, not everybody had such conveniences. The minister should make it his duty to remember those who had no electric ranges. "We are not any worse off than the Bromleys, and give just as much if not more, even if they have got a Packard."

Mr. Brown, meanwhile, in shirtsleeves and a big straw hat, started for the chicken house to gather the noon's eggs. He opened the door, and stepped over the threshold. His legs were stiff but still strong. Mr. Brown was fifty-three this last May and really did not look much older than when he had come here twelve years before. He was not handsome nor fresh looking even then, for his neck already resembled a worn-out cork, and over his disheveled eyebrows, arrows quivered deeply. These last were not deep from thinking; little time was left for thought during his busy day, and his leisure was taken by meals, a newspaper, and sound sleep. Furrows came from strenuous lifting of heavy grain sacks, from staring inquiringly under each roost to see if some eggs had rolled down, from watching droopy hens and seeing that no food was wasted.

Now he proceeded through his rebuilt hen house, enjoying the looks of it, stooping to let a faucet run, to spill some dirty water from a crock, and shooing a couple of hens that had started to fight. With a cavilous hand he gathered the eggs from each nest, often three at a time. Most of the birds had no objection and even would lift themselves submissively. A very few tried to gather the eggs under their wings, or even to bite Mr. Brown's hand. Mr. Brown had nothing to kick about; his flock was of the very best, all While Leghorns with high combs, red as sealing wax, and wiry feet that never seemed to tire of scratching. They ate all day long and as to eggs — "Say, by Golly, they lay well," Mr. Brown would tell his neighbors.

In one nest he found a skinny hen sitting over the eggs. Her comb was faded. Her poor feathers rose up as soon as Mr. Brown stretched out his hand for the eggs. She gave a poignant,

piercing shriek, her angry, feeble body came forward with distracted courage. She tried to frighten him away, all fear herself.

"Again a broody one," grumbled Mr. Brown. "Silly thing, don't you know that you can sit over those eggs a century, and nothing will come of it? None of you has seen a rooster since four weeks of age."

With an effort, Brown pulled her out of the nest. She was so light, weighing scarcely anything, yet she beat her wings with resistance and continued to shriek piercingly, as no other hen in the house could. The other hens looked at her with curiosity. One with a high, flaming comb came and pecked her with disdain. The poor creature dashed away to hide in a dark corner, while the triumphant hen wandered out into the open.

Mr. Brown captured the broody hen once more, and forced her to the hopper, where a long line of well-fed hens ate with vigor and carelessly spilled the mash in their eagerness. But the skinny, dishevelled bird did not even seem to see the feed, as though her subtle, dried-out body had forgotten what hunger was. As soon as Brown went out, she started back to her nest, wobbling as a drunken one on her feeble, unsteady feet. She found no eggs, the nests were empty — just the blonde straw with droppings here and there.

Meanwhile, Brown, with a pail of large, clean eggs, went down into the basement. He could smell the enticing odor of roast in the oven descending from above. The stifled laughter of the children over the Sunday's "funnies" rang softly at intervals.

Mrs. Brown's face was now shiny with the rich, thick air of the kitchen. But the pale sister-in-law, who had come from a near-by town to make a short visit, looked unhappy and weary. She helped indifferently with the dinner, for her thoughts had only one path. Her lover, in whom all her late hopes were consecrated, had left her. For years she had missed love, then the hope had come when she least expected it. Greedily she had clung to it with all her being — angular, drab little woman — but the hope had gone almost as swiftly as it had come.

She eyed her sister-in-law, pregnant with her third child from the homely Mr. Brown, almost feeling the weight and warmth of her disfigured body. It embarrassed Martha to look at her . . . yet within her own timid, skinny self there was a want of warmth and heaviness. Now that she

had sensed love and lost it, the yearning want had turned into pain . . . a persistent gnawing. Even the rich, golden, gravy-bathed roast filled her with a lyrical desire for meals she might have cooked in her own home. As she set glasses on the table, her mind was tortured with the dreams of things she would never do to serve his love.

Mrs. Brown felt very sorry for "poor Martha". Later in the day they would sit on the porch and talk of troubles, but now she was busy. "To be frank, it is her fault," said Mrs. Brown to herself, "I was afraid it would come to that . . . Charley, cut the bread — no, no, don't cut too many. Who wants more can cut it himself. Why waste? Last night I had to throw away four pieces to the dogs. . . Men do not like reproaches or sentimental stuff — besides she is thirty-two and no beauty." She glanced sideways at Martha's skimpy bangs, curled for Sunday — the little hooks unable to cover the bulging forehead or make her beautiful. "Children, call Father, dinner is ready. Are your hands clean?"

During the heavy meal, Mr. Brown told about the broody hen.

"I noticed it three days ago," remarked Mrs. Brown. "That is when you should have taken her out. By now, she must be good for nothing. No use keeping birds like that."

"She doesn't cost anything for she doesn't eat a thing," protested her husband.

"It may be true, — still she is a bad example for the flock." Here Mrs. Brown left the table and returned with the successful custard pudding, and the conversation changed to how the milkman neglected to leave milk, and at first she did not know what to do. Then, — she decided to try evaporated milk, the neighbor said that evaporated milk will never do for custard — "now look, didn't it?"

After dinner, Mr. Brown took a nap and was late for the five o'clock feeding. At a quarter of six, he entered the chicken house with a pail and started to throw grain. "Brj . . j, brj . . j . . j" the hens darted like mad, up on his shoulders, on the edges of the pail and even brushed his face with their wings, flying around. In the commotion he forgot all about the broody hen.

She was sitting noiselessly in a dark nest upon a little egg. No one disturbed her now, the others having left their nests to scratch vigorously on the floor for wheat. She could hear their persistent tapping of beaks and the rustle of the straw. Those who already had plenty stood in a circle

around the crock, dipping their heads to the fresh water, and lifting them up to swallow.

When the sun had rolled nearer the line of the hills, stretching rays over the yards through the lower branches of the fruit trees, Brown came with a wheelbarrow load of greens. The hens became lively once more, catching the fresh, crisp leaves of cabbage, tearing them, running around with bits in their beaks for sport and exercise. When their crops were stuffed, they began to seek their roosts. Some fell asleep immediately. Others crowed and changed seats, and their soft, gurgling protests sounded occasionally. An egg dropped out of a drowsy hen upon the boards and broke. Some greedy ones ran to her and ate it up, smearing their white feathers with yellow, then returned to their roosts gorged with the forbidden sweetmeats. Little by little, sleep came to all of them, and a light snoring was heard throughout the house. They breathed heavily, their crops thick with grain and juicy leaves.

The broody hen sat still over the little egg, eyes wide open. Her long, bony chest projected like the keel of a boat, but her abdomen was soft and hot with life-giving warmth. Once or twice she commenced to doze but soon opened her dark, feverish eyes. She could not see in the darkness, but they shone with the intense want of her. In the middle of the night, thirst became unbearable. She rose slowly, beating her wings to help her numb feet, and went to the crock of water. She drank just one drop and hurried back to the dear little egg for fear it would be cold.

It happened that Mr. Brown's back became very sore. He often suffered with lumbago. Neighbors came to help with the work, but it was poorly done. Brown grew impatient, threatened to work with his sore back, but his wife opposed him very decidedly.

The broody hen was forgotten, though Mr. Brown reminded his wife six times that she should take the hen out and put her in a cool place to break her of setting. "All right, all right . . . everything will be done, don't worry about your hen — don't stay near that window, there is a draft there. Why did you take off that hot water bag?"

"Should you leave her one more day in the nest, she'll starve to death," added Brown.

"For Heaven's sake, you make me tired with your hen. What is she to you, the worst hen in the flock, with two thousand better ones. I can hardly stand on my feet. It would not hurt you

to think a little more for your wife."

And so the broody hen remained sitting over the little infertile egg. Others laid large eggs beside her, they pecked her faded comb. The comb was covered with sores, no down was left on her head. Her feathers were broken too, so that when she bristled up, they stuck out like tooth picks. She even gave up going to the fountain for water, she was so weary and frightened. All day long, the husky birds attacked her. Often they would sit over her and leave droppings on her back. It was only in the night, when they slept, that she knew peace. Listening to their snores, she sat quietly and looked into the darkness, warming with her hot abdomen the little egg.

At breakfast a day later, Mr. Brown again asked about the hen. His wife lost patience.

"It takes one like you to be persistent and inconsiderate of others. You take a fancy and one could die before you'd notice."

"I only asked and can't see no sin in it."

"You can't but I can."

The silence came down thick with Mrs. Brown's indignation. They finished their coffee and rolls with butter without another word. Mrs. Brown left the house with poorly suppressed anger, her lips shut, every muscle taut and menacing. She knew the broody hen was in the fifth coop and went right there. She hardly had time to raise the board covering the nest, before a terrifying shriek cut the air. Its sound was thinner than before, sharper with fear. Mrs. Brown seized the bird with her strong hand that was so capable at rinsing or rolling pies. The hen pecked her hand in despair but Mrs. Brown simply pulled harder, and yanked the feeble creature out. Now she had her, — homely, baldheaded, disgustingly dirty, full of sores, a burning body under a skinny breast bone. Her little round eyes were distended, a fierce shriek tearing her crooked throat. Taken suddenly by a terror too, Mrs. Brown ran back to the house to her husband who was mulling over his morning paper. Overcome with repulsion she screamed, "Here . . . have your hen. Just look at it, and for this trash you pester me all day long. Beauty, isn't it? I don't believe the cats would even eat it."

Mr. Brown's eyebrows trembled slightly, so did his lips, and for a second his face was strangely distorted. Lumbago is a painful thing.

The hen kept on shrieking feebly until her severed head fell to the ground by the chopping block.



# OLD LADIES

AUGUST W. DERLETH

## I

There is something about old ladies. It is in the age of them, the aspect of age in the posture of their bodies, in their faces, looking from their eyes. They are sometimes like carven stone, old and still; they are waiting. Frail and old, trembling — some of them, they are waiting.

## II

I remember Miss Augusta. I saw her one day sitting in a lawn swing, stiffly, holding both sides tightly. She wore a grey dress, crinoline, with a wide white ribbon around the waist, a ribbon, its ends flowing and dangling behind her, sometimes crushed against the laths of the lawn swing. She was moving gently with the wind, to and fro, sitting stiffly and quietly, her arms pressed against her sides, her hands tightly holding to the braces of the seat. This old lady, Miss Augusta, sitting in a swing stiffly, swinging gently, gently in the wind. The wind moving softly through her white-grey hair, playing about her eyes, cool upon her neck. Her face lined and worried, gaunt, her eyes dim, her sight slowly fading. She was tall, her dress not fitting her too well.

I remember Miss Augusta because she talked so much of her friends, the governor, the senator. When I saw her sitting in the swing, looking like a picture from an old calendar, a political campaign was sweeping Wisconsin. As I watched her from a nearby window, I heard a door slam somewhere, and her sister Ida came toward the swing, holding in her hand an open newspaper. As she came along, she said, "Augusta, Phil will speak at Deerfield tonight."

Miss Augusta nodded and smiled, showing her teeth. "Phil will win. He will be our next governor. I know it; no La Follette will be beaten in Wisconsin."

I thought, Wisconsin, land of the La Follettes. I raised the window a little and heard Miss Augusta talking to herself. She was saying something about the late great Robert M., "He took my hand. He looked at me. He said, 'It's Miss Augusta.' He never forgot me." She was silent a while, listening to a robin-thrush caroling nearby. Then she spoke of Senator Bob, the son who had taken his dead father's place. "He sat next to

me. He said, 'Miss Augusta, my father knew you well.' . . . Oh, Phil will win, must win!"

I closed the window, and went away. On the night of the election I saw her standing at her window looking out into the sky. I went over to her and she saw me. I wanted her to see me. I had news she would be glad to hear. Seeing me, she opened the window and leaned out. "Have you heard how Phil is coming?" I smiled, saying, "His majority is ninety thousand; he can't lose." She laughed suddenly, and then began to cry. "I knew it, I knew it," she murmured, half crying, half laughing.

I remembered this joying figure silhouetted against the lamplight from behind, crying softly in the still November night. Two days later I saw her in the streets, reading a letter. Seeing me, she waved the letter, calling out, "A letter from our governor." Her voice was gay; it was not an old woman's voice.

She left the town not long after to live with her sister-in-law in Baraboo.

## III

I remember one day seeing Mrs. Meyer in her garden, surrounded by flowers, standing a little bent, picking bachelor's buttons. "A few flowers for the parlour," she explained. I said they were very pretty, watching her. She was not well. "It's my back," she said, when I asked. "It hurts now." There was in this "now" the knowledge of age — soon there would be no hurt there, no garden, no flowers for the parlour — nothing. She saw that.

She was wearing a blue dress. Calico, I think. The flowers were purple and lavender, some of them more blue than purple. She held them pressed tightly against her side, but when she talked she let them hang listlessly, heads down, from her hand, shifting them from the right to the left hand occasionally as she talked. Talking about her back it was necessary to have the flowers in the left hand because she used her right to make vague motions along her right side to indicate that her back hurt her all the way along the spine.

She was a very small woman, almost tiny, somewhat shrunken, I thought. As I talked to her, her big daughter Emmy came out and said, "Hello,"

laughing because she always thought of what a clown I was working at her side in the canning factory summer after summer. Sometimes her mother worked there, too; the same bent little figure, almost always dressed in blue calico. I can see her pinched elf-like little face very clearly, can see her bending over the conveyor, green with peas, sorting them.

Her face was lined and worn, as if she had suffered much. She smiled often, however, and was cheerful despite her back. It was her shy smile that made her face elf-like.

I remember her so vividly today because she died yesterday, and they are burying her this afternoon because her daughter Emmy is just recovering from scarlet fever, and it would not do to have this little old woman dead in the house with Emmy.

#### IV

There was Mrs. Williams, she who had gone deaf and lost her mind not long after. I remember her standing at the window of her house of red brick, where she lived with her daughter, talking to herself in a cascade of shrill monosyllables. I understood no single word. Seeing her that way, coming upon her so suddenly in the window, her short round figure limned against a light from behind her, her head low on her shoulders, bowed a little, her lips moving with incredible swiftness, frightened me a little.

I heard her voice shrilling into the night even after I had gone a block past her. And after that it rang in my ears. I thought, there is something behind that; what is it?

The next time I heard her, I listened intently, and I could make out sounds which seemed to be, "He's coming!" But nothing else. Perhaps she feared someone's coming; her voice sounded frightened, I thought.

Once more I heard her. It was late at night. Somehow she had got out of the house, and I came upon her suddenly standing in the shadow of a large elm. It was a night in April, and I was thinking of the spring budding out in the trees. I would never have seen her, for I cut across the street under the light. She saw me there and at once her voice broke into my reflections. At first I did not know what it was, a weird gibbering striking like that into my thoughts. I grasped my stick more tightly, turning a little; then I saw her standing behind the tree. I saw her shadow first, but at once I knew.

I went on quickly, slipping into the park, losing

myself in the shadows. Then I watched her. I stood there in the shadows watching her. Then it came to me. The old woman was scolding someone. Her voice was sharp, shrill, petulant. But she did not speak words, only sounds like gibberings. Nothing came clear. She, being deaf, did not know how she spoke. She had turned toward the shadows where I was standing; I thought, does she see me here? Perhaps she could see in the dark. I could not tell. I became uneasy, watching her, listening to her scolding in the April night, her shrill, incoherent babble beating toward me in the still air.

My uneasiness crept up, mounted; I slipped back a little. Then she stopped scolding. She came forward a little into the light, looking up into the sky, her face old, wrinkled, her lips smiling happily, the reflection from the streetlight, swinging gently and alone in the spring wind, glinting from her glasses. Then a sudden movement from one of the houses near. Her sharp eyes caught it, and at once her voice broke out again, shrilling, raging against this movement in the April night.

I slipped away, still wondering. I had found out nothing about her. She was not afraid, and she scolded at everyone and everything. A movement irritated her. She wanted to be alone.

A block away I turned around. Another figure had come silently up behind her, stood there talking to her in a clear voice. It was her daughter, coming to take her home.

I did not see her again.

#### V

Miss Emma, too, lost her mind. I had never known Miss Emma before this happened to her. I remember hearing about her, hearing people say that she told fortunes, that she was leagued with the devil, that it would not do for anyone to cross her, to quarrel with her. It was said that she could make the chairs and tables move in her little house.

The house I remember because my grandfather was born there. He had pointed it out to me one day. It was a low one-story house, set close to the ground, a pioneer's house, a house where my great-grandfather had lived. Now, Miss Emma lived there.

They said no one would dare to cross her, yet the first time I saw her thin bent figure, she was quarrelling violently with her next-door neighbor, spitting epithets at this younger woman in a hot stream. They were fighting bitterly, each striving

to outdo the other. Miss Emma won the battle; she could curse louder, more shrilly, more effectively than the other. Besides, she knew twice as many imprecations. Listening to her, I could almost believe that she knew something about the devil, the nature of the epithets suggesting that her knowledge was of his private life.

That was the only time I saw her before she lost her mind. I remember her tall figure, bent in venomous rage, her thin arms flailing the wind, her dark foreign face contorted in her anger, screaming into the sky against her neighbor, a troublesome, meddling woman who was known to seek quarrels. Miss Emma won; I remember being glad she won.

Then I saw her once after her mind had gone. She was walking down the middle of the road, holding her thin body very stiff and straight, her skirts in her hand, pulled up a little way from the dust. From her path exactly in the road's center, she could not be got to budge. Raucous horns failed to move her, smothered curses were lost in the wind.

Watching her, I thought, Miss Emma's in a rage again! I watched the old woman with a smile on my lips. Not many days before, she had brought her brother away from an asylum and buried him where he had wanted to be buried. She had not much money; it was a great kindness of her to prevent his being buried as a pauper.

Two days later I heard that they had taken Miss Emma to this asylum. There were other things, they said; walking in the road was not the least. She had gone feeble, too; she could not live long.

For a moment it hurt me to think that now this lonely old woman would be buried as she feared her brother might be. Then I learned she would be buried next to him, no matter what happened, and this comforted me.

## VI

I remember Miss Ella because I never saw her without her oldfashioned green umbrella and her bag, bulging with her rubbers. The brightest days never saw her without them.

Miss Ella was a strong, well built old woman in her seventies, handsome and dignified in her own way, her hair not yet grey, her voice harsh, contrasting the rest of her. She could be seen at most bridge parties, and could often be met in the stores, looking around, fingering goods, buying little.

I remember her distinctly from many meetings,

but two of them stand out — the first time I noticed her carrying the umbrella and rubbers, and once at a dinner party at her home.

The first time I noticed the umbrella and rubbers was in a little shop for ladies' apparel. I had dropped in to chat with the proprietress, an old friend, a friend of my parents', a woman whose people had come to my town with my people in eighteen-forty-eight. Miss Ella came in, bustling, as if in a hurry. She was carrying the umbrella, and when she opened her bag a little later, I saw the rubbers. Miss Ella held up the umbrella, saying quickly, firmly, "Can't tell when it might rain." Then she put the umbrella down next to her chair. Outside the sun was shining; not a cloud could be seen. I spoke of this later to someone and was told then that Miss Ella was never without this protection against rain.

The memory of her at the dinner party does not stand out for the same reason. I remember her there partly for a story she told, partly for the way in which she told it, dominating everyone else at the table.

The story concerned pioneer days, which Miss Ella could well remember. It was about her father and an economy program he had put into effect to tide them over evil days. (It was difficult for me to imagine them ever in a time of stress; they were wealthy now, wealthy as far as small town people could be so.) Her father had a store, and at a time when dress goods were not selling, he forced his daughters to use unsold goods to make their dresses. There was a particular bit of green goods, some material from Paris, very expensive. The girls had hoped it might not sell, and it did not; so they got their green dresses. The material, however, wore unexpectedly long, and when it did finally become shabby, the girls found to their horror that there was still enough goods left for a second group of dresses. These, too, they wore. Then they had handbags made of the leftover material. In the end, the girls got so sick of green that they could not bear the colour, could not wear it again, had not worn green after that to this day.

The manner in which Miss Ella related the story is what particularly remains in my memory. There were around the table besides Miss Ella, her sister, Miss Thekla, her brother, Gustav, and her cousin, Charles. Those were the immediate family; there were guests, who were to listen. The members of her family aided Miss Ella in the telling in various ways. They nodded solemnly, they



clasped their hands when she did, they laughed when she smiled, their eyes twinkled, their hands made vague movements trying to emphasize the story, they tried to break into the conversation with little comments of their own, Miss Thekla even going so far as to take issue with Miss Ella as to the exact colour of the detested material.

Miss Ella, whose "t's" sounded like "d's", "f's" like "v's", whose "s's" made a sharp hissing sound, started out in a quick voice, emphasizing every fourth or fifth word, thus: "You know, my *father* had a *store* when we were *small*, and all the *goods* that didn't *sell*, we had made into *dresses*." Sometimes Miss Thekla would interject, "Such nice dresses!" and Miss Ella would raise her voice. Miss Ella clasped her hands, tapping her thumbs together, and continued, "Well, my *father* got some *fine French calico*." Miss Thekla nodded and whispered, "Such fine French calico!" Gustav smiled; his eyes twinkled. Miss Ella smiled, and at once Miss Thekla said, "It had a pin stripe in white." Miss Ella quickly took up the story again, differing a little with her sister, making the stripe a little wider, and Miss Thekla was confused and dismayed. "And finally, you *know*, we had to have *dresses* made out of it — all of us had *dresses* made out of it — and *bags* — ach! *everything*!" Miss Ella threw up her hands. "And you *know* we just *couldn't* wear it out — it was such *fine* material — but *ach!* we got so *sick of green*, because we had to *wear them* and *wear them* and *wear them* for a *number of years*, and we got so *sick of green* that not *one* of us has had a *green dress since!*" At this point the members of the family looked at each other and smiled and nodded, then with twinkling and triumphant eyes looked at their guests, their eyes saying, have you ever heard such a remarkable story? Cousin Charles, who had heard the story dozens of times, dutifully burst out laughing, his hearty "Haw-haw" dominating all the laughter. And then, in the midst of all this laughter, the sisters, Ella and Thekla, making quick movements with their hands as if to seize this laughter and thrust it aside, united in saying, "And you *know*, you *know*, we *still* have some *scraps* of that material *left!*"

It would be difficult for me to forget her eager face, dimly lit by the candles on the table, she bending forward a little, her eyes snapping, her hands clasping and unclasping, the impressions of age lost in the candlelight.

I saw her on the street a few days ago; she had

the umbrella along, and the bag with rubbers. Again she was an old woman, yet dignified. Seeing me in my long winter coat, she said, "You look like a monk, young man. You would make a good monk!" She smiled good-naturedly and went on. I did not forget this, either; Miss Ella, a Freethinker, telling me I would make a good monk.

## VII

I could never forget Mrs. Hurd.

My sister and I used to visit Mrs. Hurd with mother. Mrs. Hurd and Sophie and Minnie, who were almost as old as mother, would sit in the kitchen and talk. Mrs. Hurd always liked it better when my grandmother came along, because my grandmother was more her own age. Mrs. Hurd and my grandmother used to talk about people that my mother and Sophie and Minnie never knew, and sometimes they would talk about the time all of them dropped away from the Church. That was long before I was born, and even my mother was very little then. They didn't talk about this very long, because our family had gone back to the Church, and the Hurds hadn't.

Mrs. Hurd was Irish. She was a very stout old woman who spent almost all her time in a big rocking chair in the kitchen. I remember her clear eyes and her black eardrops, and the way she smiled. She usually wore black, though sometimes she had on a dress of a dark blue colour. Mother and grandmother and Mrs. Hurd and her daughters spent most of the time visiting in the kitchen. Grandmother and Mrs. Hurd always talked about old times. Mother and Sophie and Minnie talked about some new dress goods, or Mrs. Schmidt's divorce, which had been dragged out for years, and usually the conversation got around to my aunt Tillie, who was rather a delicate subject because no one knew exactly where her husband had gone to after she had my cousin Neil.

During all this time, my sister and I would have to listen or go into the front room and look at the magazines. When we got tired of *The Delineator*, and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping*, we might play the phonograph. My sister would pick out the records and I would wind up the machine and put them on. There were a great many records, but my sister had some favourites, and I had, too, because after playing them all over so many times, there were bound to be some we liked better than the others. One of these was a song record called *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*. I think John McCor-



mack sang it, but I'm not sure. It was a rather sad melody, but wistfully pretty; both of us liked it very much, and we insisted on playing it, in spite of our previous experience with it.

We would put the record on, and right away the voices in the kitchen became lower and lower and then suddenly died out. Then we could hear a vague, disturbing sound, and before we got even to the chorus of the piece, Sophie came into the room and went up to the phonograph and took the record off. She put it away and said, "Mamma always cries when she hears that piece. You wouldn't want to see your mamma cry, would you?" Then she went back to the kitchen, and the voices began again.

I don't think my sister had any thoughts about this happening, and I know I didn't at first. When Mrs. Hurd was visiting away from the house, we could play the piece all we wanted, and we couldn't understand why she cried when she heard it. We didn't know about her being Irish then, and I afterwards came to think that her being out of the Church had something to do with it, too. I did not understand. Sometimes I felt vaguely that we were doing wrong to play the piece, but the feeling was not definite.

It was not easy for me to imagine why Mrs. Hurd cried when she heard the piece, and it is because of that and what came after that I cannot forget this stout old woman.

In the summer of 1925, part of which I spent in Chicago, a letter from my mother told me that Mrs. Hurd had died quite suddenly. Later I read her obituary in the paper, and it was then that I found she had been born in Ireland. In

the following winter, mother sent me down to the Hurd house to get some sewing from Sophie, who lived there with Minnie now. It was the first time I had been in the Hurd house for two years. When I asked for the sewing, Minnie said it wasn't quite ready, and would I please wait while she and Sophie finished it?

As I sat there, waiting, my eye fell upon the phonograph, and it seemed natural that I should play it. And it was inevitable, I think, that I should find *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen* and want to hear it. I remember putting it on and thinking about Mrs. Hurd, thinking that her crying would never again stop me from hearing the piece.

And then I heard someone coming down the stairs, and in a moment Minnie looked into the room and shook her head. For a second I did not grasp what she meant, though I should have known. Then I jumped up and took the record off the machine.

"It's Sophie," said Minnie softly. "She always cries now when she hears that piece. Since mamma's gone, you know."

I never heard that piece again. I never wanted to. Whenever I hear it mentioned I think of stout old Mrs. Hurd, crying mysteriously in her old chair close to the stove in the kitchen of the Hurd house.

## VIII

There is something about these old ladies living in my memory. A baffling youth hidden, flashing forth unlooked for, youth past but not lost. It is, I think, the aspect of age reflecting upon lives past.

# CINEMANIA

CYRIL JOHN CLARKE

It was Friday morning and a new picture was opening at the Byzantine Theatre. The theatre was scheduled to open at ten-thirty. When Harry Devine got there at a quarter to ten there were already several hundred people waiting for the box-office to open. They formed two straggling, irregular lines that stretched from the box-office almost to the corner. The people in the inside line leaned against the walls and plate glass windows of the buildings adjoining the theatre and those in the outer line shifted their weight frequently from one foot to the other, and they all

craned their necks from time to time to see if there was any activity at the box-office.

Harry stopped for a minute to look at the crowd. He never quite got used to the sight of these people. Every morning he saw them lined up there waiting patiently for the house to open and take them in, and every morning he had the same feeling of surprise and bewilderment. What made them go to the movies at that hour of the morning? Mostly, he supposed, it was to avoid doing something else. This morning there was the usual mob: salesmen and high school kids, stage

struck girls, chronic job hunters, a few women who had done their shopping early and were seeking release. They were gathering earlier than usual today, though.

He walked over to the box-office and slid his hand under the window, groping for the button that rang the nightbell in the checkroom. He found it and pressed it hard and heard the great bell clanging loudly inside. The clamor of the bell always amused him and he thought now that he would ring it some day while the show was on. Some day when he was ready to be fired. That might be any day.

Nobody came to open the door. Already, so early in the morning, it was very hot on the sidewalk. By noon the Loop would be like a furnace under the September sun. Harry shaded his eyes with his hand and peered through the glass door. He could see nobody inside and finally he got out his keys and after several attempts found the right key and unlocked the door. He went in and locked the door after him. In the marble-floored lobby it was cool and dim and in the half gloom the huge crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling had the look of icy stalactites. He stopped there for a moment to inspect the easels that held stills showing scenes from the feature film. He went on into the foyer and met a uniformed usher coming out of the checkroom.

"Well," Harry said, "I knew you were all dumb around here but I didn't know that you were deaf too. Maybe we ought to get a bigger bell."

"I'm sorry, sir," the usher said, "I was answering the telephone in the checkroom."

"Oh well, that's nothing to be sorry about. But are you the sole survivor here? What is this anyhow, a morgue or something?"

"No, sir. The other ushers are having a little meeting downstairs to drill some new men. Mr. Fields and Mr. Brown are in the office, I think, sir."

Harry laughed and punched the boy lightly in the stomach. He said, "All right, sir. I'll go wake them up, sir."

He walked on through the foyer. He heard the band playing in the auditorium. They were rehearsing the stage show. The walls of the foyer were ornamented with carvings and finished in gold leaf with great splashes of vivid blues and reds. The big arm chairs along the wall were gilt and red and blue like the wall. The heavy carpet was crimson. The lighting fixtures in the low ceiling and along the wall were smaller replicas of

the great chandelier in the lobby. Now only two small lights on the wall were burning and in the dimness the gaudiness of the place was somewhat diminished. Ordinarily Harry did not notice the place. He had grown used to it. But always when he came back to it after having been away for a day, as he had the day before, it aroused his critical spirit. Yesterday he had taken a day off and had driven with some friends out into the country. He had almost forgotten the Byzantine. Now he was sharply aware of it. He looked about the foyer and thought how appropriate it all was to the scenes and performances that took place in it. He remembered thinking when he had first come to the Byzantine that it was an architectural satire on the movies. It was still that in effect but not in intention. He knew now that the architects had been convinced that they had created a masterpiece. He grinned at the thought. The place was like a gilded and opulent brothel.

At the end of the foyer where a wide stairway led down to the lower promenade he met Fields and Brown. Fields was the assistant manager and Brown the treasurer. Fields was wearing striped trousers and black jacket and vest, the regulation dress for managers and assistant managers of all Popular Theatres.

"Good morning, slaves," Harry said.

"Morning," they both replied.

"Say, Brown, you'd better get your doorman out there to control the mob passions."

"Okay," Brown said and went away along the foyer. The treasurer had charge of the front of the house and directed the work of the cashiers, ticket takers and doormen.

"My, my," Harry said, looking at Fields with mock admiration, "but you do look nice. You managers of these big movie theaters must have awfully good jobs to be able to wear such swell clothes all the time."

"Yeah," Fields said.

"Looks like a big day before us."

"Yeah, all the double chocolate morons will be here to get the lowdown on Carol Dow's 'Night of Passion'."

"How's the rehearsal going?"

"All right."

"Who's here in the way of exalted visitors?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody from the office at all?"

"No."

"Well, we're certainly out of favor at the court."

Harry turned and walked into the auditorium. On the stage twelve girls in street clothes were walking through a chorus routine and in the raised orchestra pit the band was playing. The musicians had their coats and neckties off and their sleeves rolled up. They looked like workmen. Later, on the stage for the show, they would look very different in fancy costumes.

The orchestra leader called out, "Is that it?" and the girls stopped going through the motions of the dance and one of them said, "Yes that's it." The band stopped playing. The leader said, "All right, what's next?" A girl sitting in the front row got up and went up on the stage and said, "This is my operatic number." The leader said, "All right, boys, the operatic aria. Got it?" He waved his baton and the band began to play. The girl stood humming and tapping her foot on the stage for a minute and then she said, "No, you haven't got it." The music stopped. "Too fast," the girl said, "you're too fast." She sang a few bars without the music, waving her hand to mark the beat, and then stopped and said, "Like that, see?" The leader swung his baton again and the band started playing. The girl sang with them in muted tones. After a few measures the leader called out, "Is that it?" and the girl stopped singing and said, "Yes, that's it."

Fields came into the aisle where Harry was standing and they went down the aisle together. The band had stopped playing. A group of stagehands was sitting in the front row. They had finished putting up the set and were criticizing the show and the girls. One of them said, "Jiggers, here's the manager."

"Don't you birds ever do any work?" Harry asked.

"Listen," one of the stagehands said, "the manager's talking about work."

"Why, we do more work accidentally than you do on purpose," said another.

"Well, if you do any work at all I know it's accidental."

"Oh, yeah? Well, who put up that set, hey? Who put up that set?"

"I wouldn't know," Harry said. "Who was it? The pixies?"

The band leader saw him and said, "Hello, Harry."

"Hello, Lou, how's it going?"

"All right."

The band leader was Lou Montrose. He was a dark, swarthy young Jew. He made a lot of

money and was famous. Confectioners named candy bars and ice cream sundaes for him and clothiers displayed photographs of him wearing their clothes. He sang sentimental songs in an untrained tenor voice and was billed as the Magical Master of Ceremonies. He was very popular with the Byzantine clientele, especially with a certain class of women and girls who came and sat and gazed at him and wriggled in their seats with orgiastic ecstasy. The girls had formed a Lou Montrose Club. Some of them came to the theatre for the first show in the morning and stayed until evening. Sometimes they brought lunch with them and ate it during the dull intervals when Montrose was not on the stage. At night the janitors would find waxed paper and cookie boxes and sardine cans scattered about on the floor under the first few rows of seats. The girls annoyed Montrose a good deal in various ways, but he really enjoyed all the adulation. He regarded it as a symbol of success, the success he had dreamed of when he was playing the piano in cheap dance halls a few years ago.

Harry said, "Finish up as soon as you can, Lou, will you? We'll have to let them in a little early this morning. We're getting a big play."

"Yeah, we won't be long now, Harry."

Harry walked back up the aisle to the middle of the house and sat down. Fields came up and sat beside him.

"How was it yesterday, Jimmy?" Harry asked. "How did we finish on the week?"

"No good. Forty-one for the week."

"Another kick in the pants. I'll hear some more moans from the office. Did Dunstan say anything about my being away yesterday?"

"He was kind of sore because you didn't say anything to him about it. Goldman was in last night too and wanted to know where you were."

"Did you tell him that I was confined to my bed with an acute attack of cinemania?"

"Oh, I just told him that you took the day off and he wanted to know if the order countermanding days off for the managers wasn't still in effect."

"I suppose we'd have done several thousand dollars more on the week if I'd stayed here yesterday. The damned fool. Every time business takes a nose dive an order comes through canceling all time off for the managers. As though we had anything to do with it. We're only glorified ushers and not very greatly glorified."

In the orchestra pit Montrose was saying,



"Next is a band number, 'A Little Kiss Each Morning' and I sing the chorus. We don't have to go through that."

"Won't the girls love that?" Harry said.

"How the hell does Lou do it anyhow?" Fields said. "What's he got? I mean he's all right of course but what's he got? The janes come in here and sigh over him and he gets paid serious dough for it. How the hell does he do it anyhow?"

On the stage three hoofers were going through an intricate tap dance and the band was playing. Harry lit a cigarette and watched the hoofers. "Those hoofers aren't so bad, d'you know it?" he said. Then he glanced at Fields and grinned, "Oh, personality, Jimmy, personality. Don't you read the ads in the magazines? Personality is the secret of all success."

The band stopped playing and the musicians gathered up their instruments and began to leave the pit. Montrose leaned over and pressed a button on the conductor's stand and the pit began to descend noiselessly. The musicians walked up the steps at the side of the stage and disappeared in the wings and the stage crew followed. The performers had all left.

Fields called out, "Charley, close in and drop the steel and give us the lights, will you?"

From somewhere backstage a voice said, "Okay."

The big curtain swung together with a soft swishing sound and shut out the glare from the rows of border lights on the stage. The curtain was crimson velvet with a great dragon in gold thread sprawled across it. The steel fire curtain slid slowly down blotting out the dragon. For a moment the auditorium was dark and then the footlights came slowly up casting a warm rosy amber glow up along the steel curtain and the vari-colored house lights came on — red and blue and green and amber lights in the coves under the mezzanine and in the great dome in the ceiling and behind the big pillars that formed the sides of the proscenium arch. The steel curtain went slowly up again. An usher went down the aisle at each side of the house unlocking the exit doors.

Harry stood up and dropped his cigarette on the floor, stepping on it, and said, "Let's go." Fields got up and they went up the aisle. In the foyer the ushers were standing at their posts. They were very erect and soldierly in their red and gold uniforms. They looked like soldiers out of a romantic play. There were only eight of them on duty at opening. More would come on

at intervals during the day and by evening there would be twenty-four on duty.

In the lobby Brown was talking to the chief of service. "All set, Brown?" Harry asked.

"All set."

"Well, let's open then and get them in off the sidewalk."

Brown went to the box-office and rapped on the door. When it opened he said, "All right," to the girls inside and closed the door again and went out on the sidewalk. The chief of service was unlocking the doors. Harry moved over to the side of the lobby and stood near the open doors. He heard the ticket machines begin to click and the doorman calling in a monotonous voice, "Please have your money ready and tell the cashier how many tickets you wish." The first customers, mostly young girls, came chattering into the lobby and hurried on into the auditorium to get seats in the front row.

Harry walked out on the sidewalk. There were long lines at the ticket windows. The lines kept reforming almost as fast as the cashiers could sell the tickets. It was very hot and bright and on the sidewalk the many little pieces of mica mixed in the cement glittered brightly in the sunlight. Going to be nice, he thought, when we fill and they have to wait an hour or two under that sun. But they'd wait, they'd wait in spite of hell. He turned back into the theatre and went downstairs to the office.

The door to the offices was directly opposite the foot of the stairway in the lower promenade. In the door at about the level of an average man's eye was a small round hole covered on the inside by a sliding panel. Harry rapped. He never unlocked a door if he could get somebody to open it for him. In a moment the panel slid back and then closed again and the door opened. A small blond youth inside said, "Good morning, Mr. Devine."

Harry said, "Hello, Great Day."

The blond boy was Harry's secretary. His name was Harold Darmond. He had come to Chicago from his home in Texas to learn to be an artist and was studying at the Art Institute. He spoke in a light, soft voice and whenever he was excited or aroused in any way he always said, "Great-Day." It seemed to be his only expletive and he used it a great deal. He never said it in a violent tone but in the same slow, soft way that he said good morning, and the effect was very funny.

The boy sat down at his desk in the outer office



and Harry went on into his own office. He took off his coat and vest and threw them on the red leather divan against the wall.

"Any phone calls, Great Day?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Well, we're being neglected this morning."

He stripped down to his shorts and went into the washroom and sluiced himself with cold water. He got a towel and dried himself and with the towel draped around his neck sat down at the desk and lit a cigarette. He picked up the mail lying on the desk and leaned back in the chair, putting his feet up on the desk. He opened the envelopes and glanced through the contents and then threw it all on the floor under the desk and got up and began to dress, putting on striped trousers and black jacket and vest. When he had finished dressing Fields came in.

"How are they coming in, Jimmy?"

"They're coming in heavy," Fields said. "We'll fill the house before the feature's over."

"I guess I must be a good manager this week. I've been a lousy manager the last few weeks. Ask Goldman if I haven't."

That was it, he thought. When they gave him a show that hadn't as much drawing power as a piece of fly paper, and the business fell off, then he was a poor manager, and when the show was a natural and business was good then he was a good manager. Well, it was nice to work on a job where things were on such a simple and well defined basis.

"Come on, Jimmy, let's go upstairs and manage the theatre," he said.

On the way upstairs Harry said, "Did you remind the boys in the booth about turning the fader down for the censor cuts in the feature?"

"Yeah. Say there's an awful lot of cuts in this thing. Those censors are getting to be a damned nuisance."

The foyer was brilliant with light. In the light the intense color of the place was rather startling. It seemed to set up waves in the air and became translated into sound so that looking at it you got the effect of hearing rather than seeing. There were a lot of people milling about, rushing in and out of the aisles looking for seats or wandering aimlessly around staring at the decorations. The ones wandering about were visiting the place for the first time. They looked a little overawed by all the magnificence. They stared at the gleaming crystal of the lights and the glaring gilt of the walls, dug into the thickness of the carpet with the

toes of their shoes and laughing a little self-consciously sat uneasily in the big chairs. They looked at the ushers with a timid respect.

Fields went up the stairs to the balcony and Harry stood at the front of the foyer and watched the people coming in. They nearly all stopped momentarily in the lobby and seemed to relax a little in the coolness of the place. Then as though restored to life they passed quickly on and their individual sounds and colors merged with the overwhelming mass of color and sound in the foyer. The foyer absorbed and destroyed all individuality.

An usher went along closing the aisle doors. Harry looked at his watch and saw that it was eleven o'clock; he turned and walked into the auditorium to catch the beginning of the feature picture. He sat in the last row. The colored lights dimmed down slowly into a tinted darkness. The title frame of the picture rippled brightly on the dark folds of the velvet curtain and then the curtain parted silently and the picture flattened out on the screen. He sat for about five minutes listening to the sound and then got up and went out to a telephone in the foyer and called the booth and told the operator to bring the sound up a point. He went back into the auditorium and sat there for a while and watched the picture.

When he came out again an usher stood in the lobby calling, "There is a better choice of seats in the lower sections of the balcony. There are side and rear seats only on the main floor." He kept repeating this over and over in order to divert part of the traffic from the main floor to the balcony and thus avoid a holdout in the lobby as long as possible. A holdout so early in the day with no chance of a spill for several hours would tend to discourage people from buying tickets.

There was a sudden commotion and the sound of loud voices at the other end of the foyer and Harry went quickly along to see what it was. A little group of people was gathered outside the last aisle. A couple of ushers were trying to keep two men apart and a number of people were crowding in to see the action. One of the men struggling with the ushers was red in the face and looked very angry. The other man had a pasty, decayed look and seemed to want only to keep away from the angry one. As he came up to them Harry heard the angry one say, "Let loose of me and I'll knock his goddam block off."

"What's the trouble?" Harry asked.

"Are you the manager here?" the angry man asked.

"Yes, I'm the manager."

"Well this louse here was getting fresh with my wife in there, that's what the trouble is."

"Getting fresh how?"

"He was feeling her leg, that's how. The dirty louse."

"No, Mister," the other man said quickly to Harry. "It was an accident, I just put my hand down there accidentally. It was an accident."

"I suppose it was an accident that you squeezed her hand too," the husband said. "I suppose that was an accident, you bastard."

The other man's defensive strength seemed to crumble all at once. "I'm sorry," he said almost in a whisper.

"I'll make you sorry," the husband said. "I'll knock your goddam block off."

"You're making a scene," Harry said. "You don't want to make a scene." He dispersed the crowd and quieted the husband, who finally consented to return to the auditorium without knocking the offender's block off. Harry turned to the other man and said, "Come along," and started toward the front of the house. The man followed. When they reached the lobby the man said, "Please, mister, you ain't going to call the police, are you? Don't call the police, mister, please. I got a wife and children."

"Why didn't you display that solicitude a little sooner?"

"I didn't mean to do it, mister," the man said. "I didn't mean it. I didn't think. It just happened. I can tell you how it was."

"Don't tell me anything," Harry said. "I don't want to hear your confession. Just get the hell out of here."

"Thank you, mister," the man said and went quickly out onto the sidewalk and disappeared.

Harry looked after him for a minute and then shook his head and walked over to the electric checkboard on the wall of the foyer which showed the number of vacant seats in each aisle. He saw that there were only a few single seats left on the main floor. The chief usher came across the foyer to him and said, "The main is filled, Mr. Devine."

"Have they got it out in front?" Harry asked.

"Yes, sir, I just gave it to them."

The chief usher went out to the lobby and began putting up the ropes across the brass rails that formed lanes at the entrance to the foyer. The usher who had been making the announcement had stopped for a couple of minutes, but now he resumed with a new formula, calling, "There are

seats in the balcony without waiting. There will be a one hour and fifty minute wait for main floor seats." The people coming in stood in the lobby and debated whether to go up to the balcony or wait for main floor seats. They looked aggrieved at the usher making the announcement as though he were offering a personal affront to each of them. Most of them finally went on up the stairs to the balcony but a few moved indecisively into the brass railed lanes. They stood there restlessly, looking a little alone and rather selfconscious as though they realized the folly of standing there when they might have taken seats upstairs. But soon they were joined by others from the incoming stream of people and as their number grew the look of lonely selfconsciousness left them. They seemed to draw a sort of courage from each other. After a while the stream began to dwindle. Harry looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to twelve. Fields came down the stairs.

"How is it on the shelf?" Harry asked.

"All right. I guess we'll fill before the feature's over. I'm going out to eat."

"Well, take your time going but hurry back. All the overlords will be in for the stage show and we must show how loyally we respond to the stern call of duty."

Fields went out and Harry walked into the auditorium. Just as he entered the sound from the screen went off. The audience began to clap. After about fifteen seconds the sound came on again. For a few minutes the dialogue went along smoothly and then suddenly it went off again and again the audience began to clap. These were censor cuts. Whenever anything went wrong with the picture the audience always clapped. Whether this was a sign of intense interest or merely a signal to notify the operators that something was wrong Harry could never quite decide. He went out and walked to the far end of the foyer and stood there looking down the long vista to the lobby. There was no movement now in the foyer. A sort of temple like hush was over it. The lights created a shifting haze that bothered the eyes a little. The faces of the people waiting in the lobby shifted too and blurred and became one face as Harry looked at them. It was the face of the public, he thought. They were all the same. They were all the same and yet they were all different. They were many and they were one. All day long they paraded through the foyer; priests and prostitutes and puritans, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs. And they all became one. He

smiled a little and thought that he sounded like second rate free verse. He must be getting "foyer frenzy". That was what the ushers called it when one of them got an attack of nerves from standing too long at attention and staring too long at the lights.

He saw the chief of service coming along the foyer towards him and went to meet him.

"Mr. Devine, there's a lady on the balcony foyer that wants to see the manager."

"What does she want, do you know?"

"No, sir. They just phoned down."

Harry went on out to the lobby and up the stairway to the balcony. In the upper foyer the usher directing indicated the woman who wanted to see him. She was standing midway down the foyer near two ornamental bird cages suspended on tall slender stands. In one of the cages was a canary. The other cage was empty, the bird having been stolen a few days before by some bird lover. Harry walked over to the woman. She was a thin middle-aged woman with a severe face.

"Did you want to see the manager?" he asked.

"Are you the manager?" the woman asked.

"Yes, I'm the manager." How many times a day, he wondered, did he answer that question.

The woman plucked at his sleeve and led him over to the bird cage that held the canary. She pointed her finger at the cage and looked accusingly at Harry. "Look at that," she said. "Just look at it. What about that?"

He looked at the cage. What the hell, he thought, what kind of a nut have I got hold of now? He looked at the cage. "What about it?" he said.

"What about it?" the woman repeated, "what about it? Are you blind?"

"I don't think so," he said, "I've never noticed it."

"You don't think so?" the woman said. "Well I think so. That cage is a disgrace."

"What's the matter with it?"

"What's the matter with it?" the woman repeated. Her voice was getting shrill and people passing along the foyer were stopping to stare and smile. She tapped her forehead sharply with her finger. "Haven't you anything up there?" she asked.

Harry smiled. "That has been seriously questioned," he said.

"It's a crime," the woman said. "You ought to be put in jail. I know all about theatres and you haven't anything to do around here and could

at least see that a poor little bird is properly taken care of."

"I'm not much of an ornithologist," he said.

"That cage is filthy. It hasn't been cleaned in a week."

"Oh, yes, it was cleaned last night as it is every night by one of the janitors."

"It wasn't cleaned last night," the woman said. "It couldn't have been cleaned last night. It's too dirty."

Harry started to say, birds will be birds, but decided not to. The words nearly fell out of his mouth but he kept them and did not say anything.

The woman said, "I'm going to call up your main office and report this. Something should be done about it."

"That's a good idea," Harry said. "They'll probably send somebody over to attend to it right away."

"I should think so," the woman said. She turned sharply away and went toward the telephone booths at the end of the foyer. Harry turned back to the stairway. The ushers were smiling a little and he smiled back at them and shook his head.

Back on the main floor the chief usher came up to him and said, "Mr. Goldman is in, sir." Harry nodded. Mr. Goldman was the big boss, the division manager. Harry walked down the foyer and met Mr. Goldman coming out of the centre aisle.

"Good morning, Mr. Goldman," he said.

"The sound isn't very good, Mr. Devine. It isn't clear."

"It is a little muffled in spots. I'm going to call the sound men in to inspect the horns."

"How is it that I didn't find any of the management on the floor when I came in?" Mr. Goldman asked.

"I don't know," Harry said. "It just happened that way, I guess."

"Why weren't you here?"

Harry was looking over Mr. Goldman's shoulder at an usher who was arguing with a woman trying to prevent her from entering an aisle. Without thinking he said, "Because I was somewhere else." He looked quickly at Mr. Goldman then saw him getting angry. He saw the anger surge up in him.

"I see," Mr. Goldman said. "And by the way, Mr. Devine, are you in the habit of taking off the day before a new show opening?"



"It would be an exaggeration to say that I'm in the habit of taking a day off at all, Mr. Goldman," Harry said. His voice was a little sarcastic. "Yesterday was the first day I've had off in a month."

"I see. You felt the need of a rest, I suppose?"

"That's right."

"I see," Mr. Goldman said. He turned away abruptly and walked out. Harry watched him go and shrugged his shoulders.

Fields came in. He said, "Brown's gone to eat. I'll be out in front till he gets back."

"Right," Harry said. "By the way, when does the manager eat?"

"Managers don't have to eat," Fields said. "They're iron men. That's why they're managers." He started toward the front and stopped and said, "Here come Dunstan," and then went on and spoke in passing to a tall, good looking man who had just come in. The tall man came up to Harry.

"What the hell did you say to Goldman?" he asked. "I just met him down the street and he was mad as hell. What did you say to him?"

"I tried to explain that I couldn't be in two places at once."

"Tactful, aren't you? You know he's touchy about this house on account of the bad business you've been doing lately and then you go and get snooty with him. Smart, aren't you?" Dunstan said. Dunstan was the district manager in charge of a half dozen theatres of which the Byzantine was one. He was Harry's immediate superior.

"To hell with Goldman," Harry said.

"Oh sure, to hell with him. Only you're apt to lose your job if you aren't careful."

"I'm a Boy Scout. I'm prepared for that anytime. Tell me something interesting."

"Where were you yesterday? Why didn't you let me know you were going to be off?"

"I tried to let you know. Where were you night before last?"

"Never mind where I was night before last."

"Right. Never mind where I was yesterday."

"In a nice peaceable mood today, aren't you? Let's go inside."

They went into the auditorium and stood for a few minutes watching the feature. Dunstan said, "Sound is good, isn't it?"

"Yes, great," Harry said. "I just agreed with Goldman that it was bad. All things to all men, that's me."

Dunstan laughed. "Maybe I'm wrong," he

said as they went out into the foyer. They walked together out to the front of the house. Dunstan looked at the crowd in the lobby and said, "You're certainly pulling the business today all right."

"Yes, all for the love of Goldman," Harry said.

At the doors Dunstan asked, "What time is your stage show?"

"What's the matter, can't anybody over in that office read? We send schedules to everybody in the place but nobody ever knows what time the shows start. It's at 12:51."

"Good. I'm going out and get a sandwich."

Dunstan went out. The chief of service came down the stairs. He said, "We just filled the house, Mr. Devine," and went on out to tell the doormen. The lobby was filled now and the people buying tickets were being formed into line four abreast on the sidewalk along the curb. The doormen were calling, "There will be a one hour wait on the sidewalk for all seats." Harry was thinking about his scene with Goldman. On the spot, he thought, I'm putting myself on the spot. Then he forgot about it and stood watching the people in the lobby. They shuffled their feet and leaned against the brass rails and against each other. They talked little and laughed hardly at all. They were dull and stupid like a lot of dispirited animals in a corral. They stared at the ceiling, at the floor, at each other and at the ushers. When they looked at the ushers there was a sort of resentment in their eyes as though they felt themselves to be the victims of a conspiracy that was preventing them from seeing the show. The ushers stared back at them with impassive indifference.

The feature picture ended and a few people came out of the auditorium. One young man going out stopped beside Harry. He said, "What's all the stuttering in the picture about? Are the talkies developing an impediment in their speech?"

Harry laughed. "Censor cuts," he said. "The censors think you aren't old enough to know the facts of life."

The young man grinned. "Aren't they nice," he said, "to take such good care of my morals? My mother would appreciate it. Well, I'll see you again sometime."

"Aren't you staying for the stage show?" Harry asked.

"No," the young man said. "I had a little time to kill and the picture proved sufficiently lethal."

The young man went out and Harry turned back into the foyer. An elderly woman stopped



him and said, "Young man, your talkies here are very bad. You should get some new machinery."

"Yes," Harry said, "we're going to get new machinery next week."

"That's good," the woman said and went on.

The ushers were letting some people in from the lobby to fill the vacated seats. A spinsterish looking woman leaving the theatre spoke to Harry.

"Are you the manager?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm the manager."

"Well, I just wanted to tell you that I thought that picture was perfectly disgusting. Nothing but sex. You shouldn't be allowed to show such things."

"Some people like it," he said.

"Disgusting," the woman said and turned away.

A little later when the stage show started Dunstan was back with a number of men from the main office. They were the heads of the various departments directly concerned with the production of the shows and the operation of the theatres. They all sat in a jury in the last row and made many comments and suggested many changes in the routine. Harry sat with them but did not say anything except when one of the others spoke to him. He noticed that Goldman hadn't returned. Goldman almost always came in to see the first performance of a new stage show. To hell with him, Harry thought. When the show ended all the men went backstage to confer with Lou Montrose. Harry stopped in the foyer to tell Fields that he was going backstage. The house was emptying and the foyer was crowded. Three young girls going out passed Fields and Harry.

"Gee, Lou is swell this week, ain't he?" one girl said.

"I'll say he's swell," another replied.

"Lou's always swell," the third girl said.

Harry laughed. "I ought to take them back to the autopsy," he said.

He went into the auditorium, down the side aisle and through a recessed door onto the stage, and up in the elevator to Montrose's dressing room on the fifth floor where the show was being discussed. The conference lasted a long time with everybody discussing the show in minute detail and making comparisons with other shows and other performers and suggesting changes for every item on the program. It was very hot in the room and a heavy cloud of cigar smoke filled the place. Harry sat on the sill of the open window and looked

down into the alley. He saw some of the performers come out the stage door and walk up the alley to the street. He paid little attention to the discussion going on about him. He had heard it all so often before. Why in hell did they have these meetings anyhow? They never did anything. A lot of pointless chatter.

The head of the stage production department looked at Harry leaning out the window and said, "What's the matter, Devine? You don't seem very enthusiastic about the show."

Harry drew in his head. "O yes," he said, "I'm just trying to get a little air."

Enthusiastic, he thought. What should he be enthusiastic about? He looked at those things day after day and week after week and they expected him to be enthusiastic. Who was he anyhow, Pollyanna or somebody?

After a long time and a great deal of talk it was finally decided to change one band number and then everybody agreed that the show was very good and Lou Montrose was very good and then everybody left. Harry went back to the front of the house through the alley and around on the street because he wanted badly to get out in the air for a few minutes. On the street out in front he found there was a long line of people again waiting to get in.

He walked through the lobby past the waiting crowds and into the foyer. He saw Fields standing near the checkboard and walked over to him. Two ushers came in through the lobby carrying a man. They carried him into the foyer.

"This man fainted waiting in the sidewalk hold-out, sir," one of the ushers said.

"Put him down on the floor for a minute," Harry said.

They laid the man on the floor. One of the ushers had just started on the job that day and he looked very young and eager and excited as he hovered about now. The other usher had gone back to his post. The boy said "Shall I call the doctor, sir?" Harry smiled at him. He had turned slightly away from the man on the floor but out of the corner of his eye had seen him open one eye wide and then quickly close it again.

"No," Harry said, "just get that big bucket downstairs and fill it with ice water and throw it on him. That'll fix him up." He winked at Fields. Fields nodded his head.

"Oh no, sir," the usher said.

The man on the floor said in a simulated weak voice, "I'll be all right in a minute."

Fields stepped over beside him. "You'll be all right!" he said in a hard voice. "Get up and get the hell back in that line before I kick your face in."

The man on the floor opened his eyes wide and got quickly to his feet and hurried out through the lobby. The crowd waiting in the lobby laughed as he went out and the man grinned sheepishly. The new usher looked bewildered.

Harry said, "Some people will do anything to get into these places, buddy. You'll get used to it."

It was four o'clock and Harry went downstairs and washed and went out to eat. When he came back Fields and Brown both went out because they had to be back and dressed at six o'clock when the admission prices changed. Harry walked along the foyer and stepped into one of the aisles. Just as he entered he saw the usher at the head of the aisle pulling his hand away from the clasp of a girl sitting on the aisle in the last row and the girl trying to recapture the boy's hand. Harry beckoned to the usher and stepped outside.

"Who's the girl?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," the boy said.

"You don't know?"

"No, sir. I've seen her before but I don't know her. She comes in here all the time and always sits in the last row on the aisle and talks to the ushers."

"Oh, I see. Trying to make the boys. A sort of sweetheart of the service department. All right, you go on in and check your aisle."

They went back into the auditorium and the usher went on down the aisle and Harry leaned over the girl. He said, "Will you please step outside for a moment?"

The girl looked a little startled and hesitated for a moment and then got up and followed him out. She was rather pretty, about twenty years old, and wore a tight-fitting satin dress that caught the reflections of all the lights and emphasized the curves of her body. Harry looked at her.

"Ladies must live, I know," he said, "but not in here."

The girl looked at him and looked away. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"Oh yes, you know what I'm talking about all right. But so there won't be any mistake I'll make it plainer. I don't care anything about you. If you want to do your stuff among the patrons in here that's all right with me. But let the ushers alone. Those boys work here. Most of them

work here because they need the jobs and you're very likely to make them lose their jobs. And that wouldn't be nice. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, of course," the girl said. She looked at Harry and smiled.

He grinned. "No, I'm not in the market either. You can go back in and see the show and hereafter don't sit in the last row on the aisle."

"Okay," the girl said. She shrugged her shoulders and turned back into the auditorium.

Harry moved out towards the lobby and stood watching the crowd. There was a constant movement of people in and out of the auditorium now. People emerged from the auditorium in little groups and moved unhurriedly out through the lobby to the sidewalk. Others released from the holdout line to fill the vacated places rushed through the foyer in a frantic race for the best available seats. The continuous flow of traffic through the foyer was raising the dust from the carpet. The dust was not visible to the eye but you could feel it in your throat.

Fields and Brown came in and went downstairs to dress. At a few minutes before six Brown came back upstairs. He was wearing a dinner jacket. With him was a girl cashier, an usher carrying a money box, and a policeman. Brown and the policeman both carried revolvers in their hands. Brown unlocked the door of the box-office and the girl went in, the usher placed the money box on the shelf inside and went back to the foyer, and Brown closed the door and went out on the sidewalk. The policeman waited near the box-office.

At the ticket windows there was a rush of people trying to get in before the prices went up. The doormen were calling out that there were only a few minutes left to take advantage of the matinee prices. Each of the doormen held a small glass sign in his hand. At five minutes after six in response to a signal from Brown they stepped into lines behind the people buying tickets. Other people coming up fell into line behind them. When the doormen reached the ticket windows they inserted the glass signs, which showed the evening prices, in the frames above the windows. The people in line behind them complained loudly about the increased price. Brown assured them that it was after six o'clock. Their watches showed that it wasn't six o'clock yet. Brown smiled and glanced up the street at the big clock on a building at the corner. The people grumbled and bought their tickets and went in.

Brown went back into the box-office and in a few minutes came out again carrying a money box. A cashier came out with him. An usher hurried across the lobby and took the money box and the policeman fell in behind them and they all went through the foyer and downstairs. Harry followed them after stopping to tell Fields that he was going down to dress.

In the office the secretary was working at the typewriter. Harry rapped on a door opposite the entrance to his own office. This was the treasurer's room where the safes and ticket stocks were kept. There was a peephole in the door. Brown opened the peephole.

"Got the matinee figure yet?" Harry asked.

"Not yet," Brown said.

Harry went into his own office and closed the door. He took off his clothes and lit a cigarette and lay down on the divan. In a few minutes the telephone rang and the secretary came to the door and said, "House phone, sir."

Harry picked up one of the phones on his desk. "Hello," he said. "Mr. Goldman is in? Asked for me? Isn't Mr. Fields there? Where did he go?" Then after a pause he said, "All right. Tell Mr. Goldman I'm dressing."

He put the phone down and went to the closet and got his clothes and began to dress quickly. He jammed studs into a hard shirt. He tore one collar putting it on and threw it on the floor and got another one and put it on and tied his tie and slipped on his waistcoat and coat and went out of the office buttoning the waistcoat. Mr. Goldman was standing in the foyer.

"Good evening, Mr. Goldman."

"This house seems to run itself, doesn't it, Mr. Devine?"

Harry was very angry. "Not exactly," he said. "I drop in once in a while to see how things are going."

"What did you do on the matinee?"

"I haven't got the figure yet."

Mr. Goldman looked at his watch. "It's six-thirty-five," he said.

"Yes, I've got a watch," Harry said.

Mr. Goldman turned abruptly and walked out. Fields came down the stairway from the balcony.

"You picked a sweet time to go up to the balcony," Harry said.

"I had to. There was some trouble up there. A drunken guy wanted to shoot somebody."

"Well, you should have brought him down here and he could have shot Goldman. He was just

in and was sore because he didn't see a boiled shirt on the floor."

They walked out toward the front and Fields went upstairs again and Harry went on out to the sidewalk and stood at the curb. The air was very hot and still with the darkness coming on and all the street lamps lighted and the lights from the shop windows shining across the sidewalk. The rush hour traffic was gone and the street was quiet in the interlude between the end of the day and the beginning of the night activities. The hold-out had spilled onto the sidewalk again and the doormen were lining the people up four abreast along the curb.

Harry went back inside and found a seat in the last row in the side aisle and sat down. He sat there for a long while watching the stage show and seeing only the bright glare of light on the stage and not distinguishing any of the figures or hearing any of the music. He was still very angry thinking about Mr. Goldman. There was a sudden excited movement on the other side of the house and all the people turned and stared over trying to see what it was. The chief of service and two ushers went up the aisle carrying a body. Harry didn't get up. In a few minutes the chief of service came in and leaned over him.

"A drunken lady just passed out and slid down on the floor over there," he said.

Harry grinned in the dark. "You're sure she was a lady?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. We carried her down to the First Aid Room. She's out cold. She'll be there all night I guess."

"Oh, no, she won't," Harry said. "This is no refuge for drunken ladies." He got up and went out. "Was she alone?"

"No, sir, there was a man with her but he sneaked out."

Harry went quickly along the foyer and downstairs and along the lower promenade to a door that bore a sign, First Aid Room. He opened the door and went in. In the room there were a white hospital bed and chair and a white metal and glass medicine cabinet. Beside the bed stood a nurse in a white uniform. On the bed a young woman lay sprawled out. She was about twenty-five, big bodied and raw boned with big breasts and heavy legs and arms. Her hands were thick and work scarred and her face was weatherbeaten and rather bovine. She looked like a farm girl. The nurse was rubbing the girl's face with a wet towel.

"Too many bright lights, Miss Watkins."



"Yes. I can't bring her to, Mr. Devine," the nurse said. "She doesn't seem to be breathing."

"Paralyzed. Wet the towel again with cold water, will you? Get it quite wet." The nurse went into the toilet and Harry picked up the girl's purse lying on the chair. He opened it and found a letter with an Iowa postmark. The nurse came in with the towel dripping.

"Adrift in the wicked city," Harry said.

"What?" the nurse said.

He took the wet towel and held it in a lump over the girl's face and pressed it between his hands, letting the water trickle down onto her face. She moved slightly but didn't open her eyes. Harry handed the towel to the nurse and slid his arm under the girl's shoulder and pulled her up to a sitting position. He slapped her face three or four times, sharp slaps that made his hand sting. The girl's eyes fluttered open and closed again. He took her by the chin and jerked her head up twice sharply. Her eyes opened and she stared blankly at him and then up at the nurse and around the room and back at Harry again. She opened her mouth and tried to speak but the words did not come. Harry rubbed the wet towel over her face.

"The party's over," he said.

A slow light began to come on in the girl's blank eyes. "Where am I?" she asked slowly in a thick voice.

"In the Byzantine Theatre. You passed out."

"In the —" She couldn't say the words and instead she said, "Oh."

"Your cavalier deserted."

"What?"

"The man with you."

"Is there a man with me?"

"There was. He's gone. It doesn't matter. Where do you live?"

"I don't know." She spoke with a slow drugged effect, spacing her words widely. Harry picked up the letter on the chair and read the name and address.

"Is that you?" he asked. The girl nodded. "Is that where you live?"

"Where?" He read the address again. "Yes," she said, "my sister's. I live with my sister." She swung her legs off the bed and stood up slowly swaying on her feet.

"Can you get home all right?"

"I guess so."

"Have you any money?"

"I don't know."

"Is there any money in her purse, Miss Watkins?"

Miss Watkins looked in the purse. "Twenty cents," she said.

The girl was trying to smooth her hair. Harry said, "There's a wash-room in there, you can fix yourself up." She went into the wash-room. Harry picked up her purse and put a dollar in it and placed it on the chair. The girl came out and began to look around the room.

"What are you looking for?"

"My hat."

"Did you have a hat?"

"I don't know."

"I guess you didn't have a hat."

The girl picked up her purse and Harry opened the door and they went out. The girl staggered badly and he held her arm to steady her.

"Been in Chicago long?" he asked.

"No, just a few days. I been looking for work."

"How did you get so drunk?"

"I don't know. I met some men in a restaurant this afternoon and that's all I remember."

They went upstairs and along the foyer and out through the lobby with all the people staring at them and whispering. Outside Harry told the doorman to call a taxi. The doorman blew his whistle and a taxi drew up at the curb.

"I have no money to ride in a cab," the girl said.

"I put a dollar in your purse. That will get you where you're going."

The girl looked at him. "You're kind," she said.

Harry smiled. "That's all right," he said. "And don't go to shows when you're drunk." He put her in the taxi and gave the driver the address, and the taxi drove away.

Harry went back into the theatre. Brown was taking another cashier down to check out. The chief of service was standing by the checkboard and Harry walked over to him.

"We're due for a big spill in a few minutes, aren't we, Gordon?"

"Yes, sir. I think we'll clear the lobby."

Soon the house began to empty. The stairways were crowded with people coming from the balcony and the foyer was filled from wall to wall. The chief of service started to open the ropes to let the crowd in but Harry told him to wait until the foyer cleared a little. He watched the people coming out and listened to their comments. A



man passing him said to his companion, "What was the name of that picture?"

"The Passion Flower, I think, wasn't it?" the woman replied. "Did you like it?"

"It was pretty good. That Carol Dow is pretty good."

"She is pretty good. She's kind of cute. I thought the picture was kind of cute."

Another woman said, "Wasn't the talking in that picture terrible the way it kept going dead every once in a while?"

"Yeah, they sure haven't got these talkies perfected yet," the man with her said.

A girl came up to Harry. "You're the manager, aren't you?" she asked him in a quick eager voice.

"Yes."

"Well, I just wanted to tell you that I thought that was one of the most wonderful pictures ever produced."

"That's awfully nice."

"It's too bad there was something wrong with the machine that made it go off like that all the time."

"That was the censors' fault. They cut some of the dialogue."

"Oh, what a shame to just spoil the picture like that."

"Yes," Harry said gravely, "it's always a pity to mutilate a work of art."

"That's just the way I feel," the girl said. "Don't you just love Carol Dow? I think she's too adorable. Is it really true that she's going to marry Dwight Tremaine the singer?"

"I don't think so," Harry said. "I think she'll marry Johnny Dolan the light heavyweight boxer."

"Oh really? I hadn't heard that. That is news." The girl hurried out, eager to spread the news of Carol Dow's latest love affair. Harry looked after her and grinned, wondering if there was a boxer named Johnny Dolan. There ought to be; it was a good name for a fighter.

The crowd from the lobby was pouring into the auditorium. Fields came down from the balcony.

"How is it upstairs?" Harry asked.

"There'll be a couple hundred seats."

The lobby cleared quickly. There was still a steady business at the box-office but not enough to form another holdout. Harry went down to the office and smoked a cigarette and talked to Great Day about his work at the Art Institute. He was amused by the contrast between the boy's

enthusiastic attitude and his drawing expression of it. After a while he went back upstairs and sat in the auditorium and watched the newsreel. He looked at the newsreel but he was thinking about Mr. Goldman. It won't be long now, he thought. Oh to hell with Goldman, to hell with the Byzantine. He sat through the organ solo and community singing that followed the newsreel. The words of the songs were projected on the screen as the organist played. The audience sang half heartedly. The earlier audiences had sung much better.

Afterward he was standing in the foyer and a woman came up and spoke to him. "I think that community singing is dreadful," she said. "Why do you have it?"

"So many people like it," he said. "Why don't you like it?"

"It's too stupid."

He smiled. "I'm sorry. But at least it doesn't last very long."

"Too long," the woman said and went on out.

At twenty minutes to eleven the last showing of the feature film began and the box-office closed. The flashing lights around the edge of the canopy and the great sign above it were turned off. The lights of the other theatres along the street were going off too and the street grew much darker so that, standing on the curb, you could look up and see the sky very dark and with only a few faint stars. Most of the ushers went off duty, only a few remaining on the late detail to close the doors and clear the house. The lobby and foyer became quiet. Brown came through with the last cashier and his little escort. Harry and Fields followed them downstairs.

Fields took off his coat and sat down at his desk in the outer office and started going through a lot of papers in the basket on his desk. Harry went on into his own office and sat down and the secretary brought some papers in and laid them on his desk. He glanced through them and signed them and gave them back to the boy.

"Do you want to dictate the daily report now, Mr. Devine?"

"I don't. Jimmy, dictate the report, will you?"

"All right," Fields replied.

Harry sat there completely relaxed, devoid of all thought or feeling, and listened idly to Fields as he dictated a detailed report of the day's events accompanied by the clatter of the typewriter. In a few minutes Brown came in and laid the treasurer's reports on the desk. Harry looked at them.

"That's the best we've done for quite a while, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, the best in six weeks."

Harry signed the reports and put them in the envelopes Brown had brought with them. Brown went out to the other room and began to change his clothes. His work was done. When he had changed he said good night and went out. The secretary came in with the report Fields had dictated and Harry signed it and gave it back to him.

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"No, that's all, Great Day. Go on home. And you don't need to come in tomorrow until four o'clock."

"Thank you, Mr. Devine. Good night."

"Good night, Great Day."

The boy got his hat, said good night to Fields and left. Harry changed his clothes. Fields was sitting on the divan smoking a cigarette.

"Why don't you change and go home, Jimmy?"

Harry said. "I'll close."

"Good." Fields got up and went out.

Harry gathered up the clothing strewn around the office and hung it in the closet. He lit a cigarette and sat down at the desk. The phone rang and he picked it up.

"Hello," he said. "Yes, talking." He leaned back in the chair and put his feet up on the desk. "Good," he said, "we had a good day. Did eighty-two." He blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling and watched it float solidly up and then dissolve into many little rings. "No," he said, "nothing happened." After a little pause he said, "What for?" and then "All right, I'll be there."

He put the phone back on the desk and leaned back in the chair and stared up at the ceiling. He was smiling a little. Fields came in putting on his coat.

"Dunstan wanted to know if anything happened today," Harry said.

"What the hell, nothing ever happens in these joints."

"You're wrong, Jimmy. Something happened in this joint today. Dunstan wants to see me in his office in the morning."

"What for?"

"To fire me."

"No? Did he say so?"

"No, he didn't say so."

"Well, what makes you think that? That probably isn't what he wants to see you about at all."

"Oh, yes, that's what he wants to see me about all right."

"What makes you think so?"

"I know the method. I've seen it done before. Goldman has given Dunstan the firing order. I could tell by his uncomfortable voice just now."

"Forget it."

"Oh, I'll forget it all right."

Fields went toward the door. "I think you're all wrong," he said.

"I'm still the manager and I insist on being right this one last time, Jimmy. Good night."

"Good night. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yes, I'll be in."

Fields went out. Harry sat at his desk. He sat there smoking a cigarette and smiling at the wall. There was a knock at the door and he got up and opened it. It was the Brinks Express men. He unlocked the treasurer's office and opened the safe and gave the money to the Brinks men and they went out, heavily armed, carrying the money bags. He went back to his desk and sat down. After a while there was another knock at the door. He opened it again. An usher stood outside.

"The house is clear, sir," the usher said.

"Well, that's fine, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"The day's work seems to be done."

"Yes, sir."

"And have you earned a night's repose?"

"I don't know, sir."

Harry laughed. "Stop sirring me and go on home and pray God to make you a good boy and save you from the show business."

"Yes, sir. Good night, Mr. Devine."

"Good night."

Harry unlocked his desk and took a bottle of whiskey from the bottom drawer. He went into the washroom and found a glass and poured a big drink. He held the glass, standing before the mirror looking at himself and thought, we who are about to die. He laughed and drank the whiskey, put the bottle back in the desk, got his hat and left the office.

The foyer was quiet and dim with only the two bracket lights on the wall turned on. The aisle doors were all open and in the auditorium the janitors were working in the bright glare of a great pilot lamp on the stage. He walked quickly through the foyer. The lobby seemed a little ghostly in the dark. The marble floor still glowed a little through the layers of dust that had been laid on it by the passage of many feet. Overhead the great crystal chandelier was cold. His footsteps sounded loud on the marble floor. He

went out onto the sidewalk. Outside a negro was polishing the brass door plates. The sidewalk was deserted and in the street there was very little traffic, only a few taxicabs cruising slowly along. The heat was heavy and oppressive and there was the feeling of rain coming. Harry held up his hand to a taxi going slowly by on the other side of the street and it swung across sharply and drew up at the curb. The man polishing the brass straightened up.

"Good night, Mr. Devine," he said.

Harry thought, tomorrow night he'll be saying good night to another manager. He said half aloud, "The king is dead, long live the king."

"What, Mr. Devine?"

"Good night," Harry said. He got into the taxi and closed the door and the taxi pulled away quickly. The negro watched it going up the street and then stooped down and went on polishing the brass.

## STONE TOWER

To Robinson Jeffers

By GERALDINE SEELEMIRE MACLEOD

Fog broods over these closer waters;  
The waves move with a certain gentleness on the white sand.  
Quiet now, they have twisted about Asia,  
And are come at last to a restless peace before the long labor  
And the strange return.

And the dead sea-gull at the wave's edge,  
The stranded drift-wood eaten by salt like worms through the  
long wandering,  
The bronze kelp thongs torn from quieter places,  
Will also return in a moment to the endless progression.  
These, dead, will wash somewhat more quietly than the others  
Over the wheeling planet;  
But the tragedy of torn timbers and the rivets split  
Will hover the waters.  
The waves will remember the dead gull.

And he greater to me than all the rest  
Will be a still surer part of the flowing shore and the wide  
water.  
After these beaten cypress (that march only this coast  
And that calmer land where another great one walked  
And silenced dark waters)  
Have endured their last pain and slow battle;  
After the stone tower on the cliff is worn,  
And strange blooms have flowered from its spread dust on the  
sea floor,  
His essence will still wander other renewed headlands  
As beautiful as these, and more tragic.



# "POURE HIPPO"

JEAN THOMAS

The creaking jolt wagon which brought passengers from the railroad station twenty miles away halted at the forks of the road and I, a lone traveler, alighted with typewriter and brief case.

The driver, Bijé Turvey, leaning from the seat, pointed with his whip-stock toward a small cabin that stood on a far off ridge. "Thar's the place. And now woman, jes' crawl under them bars yander," indicating a worm fence that zig-zagged off in the distance, "and foller the foot path up the mountain." He paused, looking at me doubtfully. "I ain't sayin' as how she will, but she's liable to. Sister Julie Holbrooks is a powerful clever woman. I've knowed her to board travelers a time or two—that is to say *men* folks; surveyors mebbe, or woodsmen. Al'lays good and kind she is to a body, p'tkler in trouble. Like I told you—mournin' is her greatest joy on earth, next to layin' out the dead."

With that he clapped the reins on the back of his weary nag and was off.

"Don't fergit to name hit to sister Julie 'bout Lindie Tackett," he called over his shoulder as I stood a moment in the dusty road.

With the portable in one hand and brief case in the other, I crept under the bars and edged my way along the narrow path between living walls of rhododendron, up the mountainside toward the cabin.

Seated on the stoop in a straight hickory chair, a worn little woman, garbed in a dark calico dress, puffed complacently on a clay pipe. She peered at me suspiciously from her faded eyes as I deposited my burden on the puncheon floor near her feet. I inquired if she would board me for a few days.

Removing the pipe from her mouth, the little creature surveyed me from head to foot, then in a soft mountain drawl inquired cautiously. "Mought a body make inquirement 'bout your business and what yer aimin' to do with them thar contrapshuns?" pointing with the stem of her pipe to the typewriter and brief case.

Their use and the purpose of my presence explained—I had come in advance of the railroad's lawyers who would take depositions of land owners along Brushy Creek—she began vehemently.

"I don't favor wimmin folks a-traypsin' 'round over the countryside with a passel o' lawyers, takin' testimony." Replacing the pipe in her mouth she drew in till thin cheeks cupped toothless gums. "Ain't ye got no kin folks in these parts?" she piped. There was hostility and suspicion in the tone.

"Well, yes, and no," I replied hesitatingly. "I did have many, but they're all over there now!" Her eyes followed my gaze toward the little burying ground beyond the pine grove. "They are my people! All of them, at rest there, are my folks. Blood kin or by marriage." Unconsciously I had fallen back into the vernacular of my mountain ancestors.

The little old lady rose quickly. There was a look of self reproach on her wrinkled face. Tapping the bowl of her pipe in the palm of her hand, she said sorrowfully, "I al'lays thought a heap o' Warins's folks. Nary one o' 'em I hain't helped to lay out." She stood a moment, resting a thin hand on the back of the hickory chair. "Come along in and make yourself at home!" She picked up my luggage and led the way through the entry way that divided the two room cabin.

She placed the typewriter on the rickety stand, the brief case on the bed, and turned to me. "Have off your things," she invited. Surely there was nothing lacking in her hospitality! She stood waiting with hand extended while I unpinned my hat, then carefully she laid it on the bed.

"Thar's the finest feather bed you ever tuck a a night's rest in," she gazed with pride at its billowy surface covered by a homespun blanket. "Pap and ma, and their'n afore 'em, an' Aunt Aremathia an' Jerusha—" she hesitated a moment, thin finger to furrowed brow, "—an' cousin Rhuhamie, that's Amos's woman, an' uncle Ero an' my man Basil wuz all laid out in hit." The little woman shook her head sorrowfully and went toward the door.

It was May and the air was stifling in that windowless cabin. I viewed with some misgivings the massive four poster on which a generation or more had breathed their last. My head, and the 'finest feather bed ye ever tuck a night's rest in' began to go around and around. I was reaching

aimlessly for the few remaining hairpins that had survived the long journey over rugged roads, through bridgeless streams. Presently I heard a voice.

"Yer harr is all fogged up and yer jes' nacherly dusty. Come along out to the wash block and tidy up a bit!" The little woman was calling from outside. When I reached the door I saw her pouring water from the well bucket into a hollowed out stone block plugged at the side with a corn cob. "Pull out the cob thar," she explained when I came near, "so's we kin reench hit out a leetle bit."

On a bench beside the primitive stone basin cakes of grey homemade soap lay drying in the sun. "Holp yourself," she said with a wave of her bony hand, "my soap drives the dirt like a nest o' hornets. Dirt's got to git! Yander's the towel a-hangin' on the stoop longside the comb-case."

She watched with silent interest the making of my toilet.

"I feel quite different now," I declared, restoring the almost toothless comb to the case, and giving a final glance into the broken looking glass. "The soap and the cold well water have done wonders."

A wistful look came into the little old lady's faded eyes. "Hit's time to start the vittals now; the shadder from the well beam is a-fallin' pint blank on the farm bell." She turned away with a mournful shake of her head. "Peers like I jes' kain't bide the idee o' not givin' hit a couplee taps to call Basil from the field, an' him dead and gone nigh on to ten year." She lifted her ragged apron to her eyes and went into the cabin. I followed.

Soon she was busy pothering around in the kitchen, talking the while of bygone days, of her folks and mine long since dead and gone.

"And now whilst the ham-meat is fryin', I'll fix a mess of snaps," she said, seating herself on a low stool with apron lap full of beans. Briskly she strung and snapped, piling high the green heap in a basket at her side, while I set the table and peeled and sliced the potatoes. Suddenly she dropped her hands in her lap and fixed me with her serious little grey eyes. "Woman," she said in her slow mountain way, "hit's a heap o' satisfaction to see a body like you that ain't above their raisin'! Peelin' taters, lendin' a helpin' hand. I everly had a favorance fur them that don't putt on airs," she added proudly, "yer pine blank like home folks." Not till then did my perplexity give

way to understanding. I realized that she had paid me the highest compliment within the gift of mountain folk.

The little old lady pulled herself up out of her chair, and gathering her apron up in one hand, the basket in the other, she went to the stove. She dumped the beans into a kettle of boiling water, and putting the basket on the floor in the corner she shook the 'leavins' in her apron out the door to the chickens.

"Do you know," she said, as we were clearing away the dinner dishes, "the more I scrutinize you, the more I see your Granny in you. Yer the spit-ten image of your Granny. Same laff, same harr, same turn." Her voice trailed off as thin as a knitting needle. "Yas, ye favor yer Granny Warins a awful sight." Pausing she turned a wistful look upon me, "She allus called me Sister Julie and tirectly all the other folks tuck hit up. His 'ud pleasure me no little if you wuz to do the same. And I — I — am a-wantin' to call you by your given name —" she looked up questioningly.

"My given name, Sister Julie," I answered quickly, "is the same as her's — grandmother Warin — asleep out yonder under the pines."

A tender light came into Sister Julie's faded eyes, "Janie Warins," she whispered softly, and a smile, the first I had seen on the sorrowful little face, played about the trembling mouth. As we stood quietly facing each other, we could hear the whinny of her old sorrel nag, grazing in the meadow, as it lifted its long neck above the rail fence now and then expectantly.

Kitchen-house put in order, we returned to the stoop and Sister Julie was again jolting to and fro in her chair, smoking complacently on her pipe. So occupied was she with her own thoughts, the little old lady did not notice that I had gone indoors to fetch my portable. It was not until I resumed my chair and began typing that she stopped suddenly, and with hovering stare gazed searchingly at the 'contrapshun' on my knees. The clicking sound of a typewriter was strange to Sister Julie's ears. I was making a list of names of those whose depositions were to be taken — Crosswite's, Marbry's, Stigall's, Caudill's, Tackett's. The last name fairly jumped at me. "I almost forgot to mention to you, Sister Julie," I cried apologetically, "Bije Turvey, the driver, says Linda Tackett is — is —" I paused a moment to recall the driver's phraseology, "—— is — mighty poorly, and they don't 'look for her to pull through.'"

"What! Lindie Tackett give up to die?" Sister Julie jumped to her feet and began untying her apron strings. "I never knowed she was ailin'." The clay pipe dropped unheeded from her trembling lips. "I hear-ed a right smart spell back that Lindie and fistey Rance Stigall's a-talkin'." She blinked angrily, "Ain't nary Stigall by name, from Old Rance up or down, that's fitten fur wimmen folks to court." Sister Julie rested a trembling hand on the back of the chair. "Why land sakes, Lindie Tackett's mighty nigh like my own flesh and blood. She wuz fotched up under my notice." The sorrowful look returned to the faded eyes. "I've helpod to lay out all the Tackett's. Come along, Janie Warins, I must make ready. We'll be bound to go." She hurried into the cabin, combing up her back locks with her tucking comb as she tottered along. I picked up my typewriter and followed at her heels. . . .

Sitting erect in her side saddle and pelting the sorrel nag with a leaf-covered branch she turned occasionally to admonish me, hanging on behind.

"Thar now, putt yer arms around my middlins, an' mind lest the quilt slips from under ye!"

"I'm-all-right, Sister Julie," I replied jerkily, as I bobbed up and down, "I-hope-we-are not-overloading —"

"Bother dash! A leetle whiffet like you ain't no double load for a nag." The leaf-covered branch came down with renewed vim and I tightened my grip around Sister Julie's "middlins."

The steed seemed as eager to reach the scene of sorrow as was the little old lady. Its eyes were flaming, nostrils distended, and hoofs clicked as fast as hoofs could click over a rocky mountain road.

Sister Julie's black calico riding skirt flapped far below her feet, and caught by the summer breeze, swept against the thumping belly of her steed. On top of her knot of iron gray hair rested a rare creation. The bonnet itself was shaped like a turtle shell and fitted snugly over her coil and about her forehead. Pinned tightly to the shell at front, and swaying and flapping in the breeze behind her, was Sister Julie's mournin' veil. Double it was, and heavy too, so that its woolly thickness quite concealed the features when be-reavement among her own blood kin required that the front half be dropped, out of respect, over the face. Tucked in her basque were two huge handkerchiefs, with heavy black borders. Thus she rode forth to every scene of sorrow!

Upon reaching the Tackett cabin, a-top a bar-

ren ridge, Sister Julie dismounted first. I followed. She dropped the dusty riding skirt about her feet, doubled it up and hung it on the pommel of the saddle. She tied the nag in the shade of an oak. Smoothing down her dress skirt and making sure the handkerchiefs were not lost, with solemn stride she crossed the 'fore' yard, and slowly made her way toward the stoop.

Sad faced neighbors, tense with anxious waiting, were huddled in groups all about. Eagerly they craned their necks. It was plain to be seen Sister Julie's mournin' veil was the cynosure of all eyes — the envy of the women folks gathered from the countryside over. Plain to be seen, too, that the hour for which they had long waited had at last arrived. Sister Julie had come! Now indeed would the flood gates be let down! "We'd about give you up," said one, red-eyed with weeping. "We wuz the first to git hure arter Bijie Turvey come along with the word," moaned another with a sorrowful wag of the head. "Marthie's been takin' on something turrible," said another in tearful voice. "She mought nigh swooned plum away when Lindie's Aunt Surildie got hure," whined a snaggle-toothed mother. "Me and Eph were jist crossin the pint off yander and we could hear poor Marthie carryin' on." "But she were worser yit when Preacher Boggs and his folks come," the quavering voice of an old granny woman interposed, "and I sez to her, 'Marthie,' I sez, 'you got a bound to quile down, or you won't be fitten to drap nary tear ginst Sister Julie gits hure. See-in' her pacified, the rest helt back too."

Sister Julie edged her way through the gathering to the side of the grief stricken mother who — with hands meekly folded, head sorrowfully tilted to one side — stood waiting in the doorway. "Lindie ailin' fur long?" she inquired despairingly. Tears filled and overflowed her eyes as she placed a trembling arm about the thin waist of Martha Tackett.

The forlorn mother blinked and gulped and finally made answer. "Lindie's been pinin' and moaning' and wastin' away ever since Rance Stigall skipped his peace bond and claired out," and Martha Tackett, unrestrained, rested her unkempt head upon the shoulder of Sister Julie and wept loud and long. The two now moved into the dark cabin. The others sobbing softly, with meek sad faces peering from under dilapidated slat bonnets, followed the chief mourners.

"Thar she lays," Martha, mother of Linda, turned her thumb in the direction of the far cor-



ner of the cabin. A ramshackle bedstead supported a miserable shuck tick and — the stricken Linda Tackett. "She ain't tetch'd a bite o' vittals. Jes' lays thar! Eyes sot in her head. Yisterday she taken one chill arter anuther an' sometimes two arter one." Martha Tackett shuddered and sobbed at the thought of her offspring's anguish, and buried her tear-stained face in the folds of Sister Julie's mourning veil.

With that, Sister Julie brought forth one of the black bordered handkerchiefs and wiped a flood of tears from her own agonized face, and dabbed with trembling hand at Martha Tackett's streaming eyes. "Don't take on that way, Marthie," she implored, placing a thin arm about the spindle waist of the wailing mother. "A body's got to go when their time comes." In vain she tried to comfort the grief-stricken one.

"Pore little Lindie! She's seen a sight o' misery," sobbed the mother. "Fur a right smart spell she couldn't even bide a bit o' light to tech her eyes. Had her pappy hang his old coat over the winder yander."

Sister Julie Holbrooks brought forth the second black bordered handkerchief from her basque and raised it to her eyes. At this signal, the men folks with bowed heads surrounded Lindie's Pappy in the doorway. The women folks hovered closer to Sister Julie. "Hit's all fur the best, Marthie; we all know hit's bound to be fur the best. The Good Lord'll give us strenth to bar whatever's laid on us, I reckon," the trembling voice trailed off into silence.

"A body's got to go when their time comes," moaned the bonneted women. Sobs and groans filled the little cabin from puncheon floor to darkened rafters.

There was a slight rustle of the shuck tick on which Linda Tackett lay in the far dark corner.

Sister Julie wept and wailed and in her anguish mopped with her black bordered kerchief Martha Tackett's eyes, and Martha Tackett with the end of her drabbed apron wiped Sister Julie's eyes. The two with locked arms now moved toward the center of the room.

There was a moment's death-like silence. The mourners waited for the signal from their leaders.

"Pore little Lindie! Pore little Lindie!" the plaintive voice of Sister Julie Holbrooks intoned the doleful dirge.

The bonneted creatures took up the chant as they fell into sorrowful procession behind their leader. Slowly they moved around and around

the dark cabin, their shuffling steps keeping rhythmic beat to the weird song of death:

*Pore little Lindie, Pore little Lindie.  
Friends a-standin' all around,  
Tears a-fallin' to the ground.  
Sister Lindie's got to die  
And be putt down in her grave.  
Oh, hit's awful! Awful! Awful!*

Suddenly light streamed through the cabin window and upon the empty bed of Linda Tackett. Her 'pappy's old coat' was no bar to the terrified girl. She ripped it from the casement and through the aperture she dashed as swift as a catamount. Clad in calico mother-hubbard, her long black hair streaming behind her, down the mountain side she fled and athwart the ridge. Nor did she stop to look back.

The self-appointed mourners huddled around Sister Julie, watching in dumb amazement till the fleeing figure disappeared beyond the mountaintop.

Sister Julie sat dejectedly in her side saddle. The leaf-stripped branch that had flayed her nag into a gallop to the anticipated scene of sorrow, now hung limply in her thin hand. Even the old nag seemed to sense its owner's gloom for its ears drooped, its eyes blinked wearily, feet raised heavily. "Poure hippo! Nothin' ailin' Lindie Tackett. Jest poure hippo!" A disappointed Sister Julie mumbled over and over.

With my arms about her "middlins" I felt tucked in her basque, the black bordered handkerchiefs — wet with wasted tears. The bedraggled mournin' veil rippled softly behind her as we silently jogged homeward over the moonlit road.

## BIOGRAPHICAL

Of the contributors to this issue of THE MIDLAND, four are new to MIDLAND readers. ALEXANDRA MAZUROVA lives in California. She was born in Russia and has had a novel and other literary work published in Russian. AUGUST W. DERLETH lives in Sauk City, Wisconsin. He has contributed to various other magazines. JEAN THOMAS is a Kentuckian and the author of *Devil's Ditties*, a recently published collection of mountaineer ballads and stories. GERALDINE SEELEMIRE MACLEOD lives at Los Angeles.

DON GORDON of Los Angeles will be remembered by MIDLAND readers as the author of the poem "The Gardens of the Sea" in the August, 1931, issue, and JOHN CYRIL CLARKE of Chicago contributed the story "Depression" to the January-February, 1931, issue.

# I'VE BEEN READING —

By FRANK LUTHER MOTT

## THE DARKER CIVILIZATION

James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan* (Knopf, \$2.50) is an informal history of Negro art movements in America. It is not strictly limited to New York City, as its title indicates, nor does it keep with entire strictness to the art life of the race; indeed, the book would be more satisfying if its field had been more surely defined. As it is, it contains readable chapters on such incidents of racial progress in America as the progress of Negro minstrelsy, the movement of organization which followed the race riots of 1900, the rise of the Negro drama, and the development of the Negro in poetry.

A lively tale, full of color and movement, is Arna Bontemps' *God Sends Sunday* (Knopf, \$2.50). The hero — and sometimes he is almost heroic despite his small size, his primitive scale of values, and his inevitable downfall — is a jockey in the heyday of American racing. He is evidently modeled on such figures as Ike Murphy and Snapper Garrison — kings among the followers of turf romance. Little Augie made his thousands in a brief racing season, dressed quite as flamboyantly and certainly more expensively than the end man in a minstrel show, and spent most of his leisure (which was considerable) with the population of the St. Louis and Memphis honky-tonks. The story is told with simplicity and effectiveness. Much of the realism is unpleasant, but one is reconciled by the utter convincingness of it all. Even the exotic bizarerie of parts of Little Augie's career raises no doubts in the reader's mind. This is one of the better novels by American Negroes. Mr. Bontemps is a teacher, and lives in New York.

But the best of the recent books of Negro life was written by a white man — Roark Bradford. *John Henry* (Harper's, \$2.50) is a continuous narrative which embodies the various folk-stories of the fabled strong man of the Negro race. John Henry was a black Paul Bunyan — a "natchal man" who could "out-roust" any bully rolling cotton onto the *Big Jim White*, who could out-swing all the spike drivers on the railroad, and who could eat more cabbage and turnip-greens and pone than any other roustabout in the Delta. He came from the Black River country, "where all good rouserbouts comes f'm," but "where the sun don't never shine" — and he had to be "gittin' around," for the was "a natchal man."

John Henry was a cotton-rollin' man.  
He had his hook in his hand all de time.  
An' befo' he'd let de driver burn him down,  
He'd die wid his hook in his han', Lawd, Lawd,  
He'd die wid his hook in his han'.

He didn't have as good luck with the women as he did with the cotton bales, and he frequently has cause for the "fawty-day blues" because he had

— a woman on my weary mind, Lawd, Lawd,  
A woman on my weary mind.

In the end he dies — with his hook in his hand — trying to compete with the new steam winch, which at last burns him down, as in his song.

Mr. Bradford thinks that the collectors of Negro bal-

lads wrong their folk material by trying to put it together in a chronological sequence, but of course that is just what he is doing in his book. I believe there is no wrong done, so long as the original spirit is maintained, the diction and rhythms preserved, and the reader allowed to know just what is going on. In regard to this last requirement, it may be remarked that a brief note of preface giving the writer's method in this book would not have been out of place: the original stories practically all end with John Henry's death from some feat of supernatural strength, but of course in Mr. Bradford's work the death must be reserved until the end.

## THE ANNUAL SHORT STORY ANTHOLOGIES

The *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1931* (Doubleday Doran, \$2) contains some excellent stories. The first place was given to that favorite of the O. Henry Committee, Wilbur Daniel Steele; but the prize actually went to the second-place winner, Mr. Steele having had his share in past years. Like all of Mr. Steele's stories, "Can't Cross Jordan by Myself" is skillfully done. Its theme is the Gates Ajar motif, which seems rather popular these days; indeed, Oliver LaFarge has a first-class story in this same volume which uses much the same idea. The first prize money went to John D. Swain for "One Head Well Done," which was a close winner over Mary Hastings Bradley's "The Five-Minute Girl." Mr. Swain's story is totally unconvincing; its characters are types; its theme has no significance whatever. Mr. Raymond Weaver, one of the judges but certainly not an authority on the literary genre involved, propounds at length (in the introduction to the volume) an odd theory of the short story in which he maintains that resemblance to actual life on the part of action and characters is "irrelevant" just so they suit each other. Mr. Swain's story is taken from *Top-Notch Magazine*, and the author may now have the satisfaction of knowing that Mr. Weaver and Miss Williams think it a "top-notch" story. Mr. Krutch, the third judge, placed it eleventh; there are eighteen stories in the volume. "One Head Well Done" is amusing, cleverly constructed, and melodramatic. "The Five-Minute Girl," which Mr. Krutch placed first, is a significant commentary upon this our modern life and a really important story. MIDLAND readers are familiar with Mr. March's "Fifteen from Company K," which placed fourth; it is certainly the most moving, and probably the most important, story in the collection.

O'Brien's *Best Short Stories of 1931* (Dodd, Mead, \$2.50) has more variety in it this year than sometimes in the past. There are several distinctly experimental studies, like those from *Story*; and there are stories from the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's*, and *Harper's*. Morley Callaghan, William Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, Louis Bromfield, and Dorothy Parker are represented. The MIDLAND stories are March's "Fifteen from Company K" and Father Ward's "The Threshing Ring." The MIDLAND is this year placed fourth among American magazines, both in total number and in percentage of distinctive stories published.

